

Seven

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Summary: Henry taught her how to pick locks and how to put that skill to use.

Seven

I don't know what this is. Just that it would not leave my head.

* * *

><p>Seven

"Now remember what I told you?"

She nodded her head strongly and smiled. "Listen. Watch. Be ready!"

He winked at her and kissed her on the cheek. "Well done my girl."

He ushered her forward, holding her hand and lifting it up slightly as the footpath changed, not wanting her to trip.

"Now. I'll be waiting right here. Get whatever you can."

She grinned and lunging forward, kissed him on the cheek. "Yes Daddy."

He breathed in sharply as she said that. He knew this was the lowest of the low, terrible, perhaps even evil. Making his seven year old daughter, pick the lock of a house on the Esplanade and steal whatever she could find was of worth. They had eaten rarely over the past couple of days and the money was few and far between, if not non-existent. He needed to feed his family and it was less of a risk sending Phryne to do this, rather than him. He would be arrested immediately, Phryne would perhaps get herself out of it, just by her

small size alone. She appeared to be the size of a six year old rather than a year older.

He held his breath as he watched her tip toe up to the veranda and pulling out his lock picks began to place them in the lock. He felt his breathing quicken and he looked from side to side, making sure no one was about to catch them. The sad thing was that what Phryne would be looking for was food, perhaps a pair of woollen socks, a few coins and the like, nothing of any real value, only things that would allow them to survive.

He breathed in sharply as he saw her push open the door, meaning she had picked the lock.

* * *

><p>The house before her was dark and empty. Thankfully the rich folk were out which meant she was able to do her favourite thing; take her time, look around, discover things.<p>

She walked through the long hallway, being mindful to tip toe carefully knowing that anyone could still be here. A butler. A maid. A driver. Her aunt had all of those things and sometimes they just leapt out when you least expected it, asking you if you wanted a lemonade when all you really wanted was something to eat.

She let her fingers ghost along the wallpaper that lined the hallway. It was bumpy and full of ridges and when she really looked closely she saw it was patterned. Curls, indents and waves, creating some kind of floral pattern that she had never seen before. It was beautiful and she closed her eyes, squeezing them tight and made a silent wish that when she was all grown up she would have wallpaper like this. She would live with Janey in a big house and they would spend her afternoons drinking lemonade and sitting in big, soft arm chairs surrounded by walls that had this wallpaper on it. It would be perfect, beautiful and what she wanted.

She made her way up the stairs, remembering that her father told her the best things were in the bedrooms. She smiled to herself and jumped up each step, letting out a soft squeal of excitement as her well-worn boots made contact with each stair. She walked down the hallway and turned into a rather large, open space room. The walls were painted a deep, dark red and there were three big, wide windows which flooded the room with light doing nothing but emphasise all the colours around her. Blues, greens, silver and gold it was so different to her house. Her house was cold, dark and brown. There were so many browns that she defied anyone to tell her that colour only came in one shade. Her mother tried to make it nice, and with the odd bunch of flowers she pilfered from her Aunt P's garden it managed to feel like home. Perhaps no one else would think so but she did. She turned her attention back to the room around her and focused on the bed.

It was a giant four poster bed and she pressed herself against the wall and then raced up to it, catapulting herself on top. She lay flat on her back, staring up at the ceiling that was painted with gold. A gold ceiling, how silly and wonderful at the same time. She let her fingers brush over the material of the quilt, soft and shiny, not like the rough sheets at home.

She lowered herself off the bed and walked over to the window. She saw her father peering up at the house and she waved. He didn't notice her instead he took a drag of his cigarette. She did really love him, but she knew he wasn't the best one out there.

She walked over to the dressing table and let her fingers brush over the perfume bottles, circling the round jars of cream and make up. She picked up a gold, cylinder shaped item and pulling off the cap, peered inside. It was red lipstick. She twisted the bottom and watched it appear at the top. Her mother had one lipstick and she only wore it on special occasions. Her mother had painted her lips red on her last birthday as a special present and she had stared at herself in the mirror, not believing that she could look like that. She placed the cap back on and held onto it tightly. She peered down at the table and counted four lipsticks. She bit her lip, knowing that this was not something her father considered worth taking but she did it anyway. She let it fall to her dress pocket, feeling the small weight of it against her leg.

She opened up a drawer and saw a wad of cash folded over and she picked it up, shoving it in her dress pocket. She rifled through the drawer and also pocketed one set of gold cufflinks, a pearl necklace and one small brooch in the shape of a star. She closed the drawer and walked over to the wardrobe opening it up and letting her fingers trail through the clothes. She grabbed the hem of one dress and pulled it out so she could see it. It was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. Light blue with silver embroidery at the waist. She breathed in sharply, it certainly beat the cotton dress she was wearing. Her dress was so old and was still too big for her, her mother telling her she would grow into it, but she still hadn't. It gaped at her arms, gaped at her waist and it itched her skin, doing nothing to keep the cold morning air away from her body.

She looked up as she heard that familiar whistle and sighing heavily closed the wardrobe before leaving the room.

She ran down the stairs, jumping off the last one with a thud and skipped through the entrance hall, down a long tiled hallway before arriving in the kitchen. She walked into the pantry and thought about what they really needed this week.

She reached for a tin and opened it seeing it was full of sugar. She tucked that under her arm and reached for a loaf of bread. She crouched down and pulled out a wooden crate under the first shelf. It was full to the brim with potatoes and she picked out four.

"Hungry are you?"

She gasped in shock and dropped the potato she was currently holding and slowly stood up. She turned around and saw a man staring at her. He was dressed in some kind of suit and she recognised it as a Butler's uniform, her Aunt making her lot wear that junk too.

"I-I-"

"How old are you?"

She swallowed deeply and hoped with all her might that he had not noticed the gold loot in her pockets.

"Seven."

He stepped towards her and she took one step back. He stood where he was and stared at the girl for a moment. He could see by her hair and face that she had not had a bath in a while and her dress which was once white cotton was now so worn and dirty that there were trails of cotton hanging off the hem and it looked to be too big for her in places. Her boots were worn and scuffed and she wore no socks. She was a skinny, small thing, somewhat mangy in appearance. He opened a cupboard beside him and pulled out a brown paper bag. He opened it up and held it out for her.

"You may as well put all that food in here. And take a few more potatoes."

She looked up at him in surprise. "A few more?"

"Yes. Anything else caught your eye?"

The people he worked for had more money than sense and a few potatoes missing from the crate would not go astray, nor would much else in this pantry.

She wondered how far she could push her luck with this man, she hadn't really eaten much this week, and neither had her little sister. She would really, really love some chocolate but she knew that was out of the question so she asked for something she knew they really needed.

"Milk?"

He sighed heavily and walked over to the fridge, opening it up quickly and reaching for the new bottle of milk which was still unopened. He also grabbed a carton of eggs, some cheese and one large steak.

He closed it with his elbow and indicated for her to open up the brown paper bag. He placed the milk in the corner of the bag, laying the steak and eggs over the potatoes, encouraging her to put the bread on top.

"Now get going and don't come back."

She nodded and walked past him, heading for the back door and then stopped, turning to face him. "Thank you."

He nodded and pointed to the door. "Skedaddle."

* * *

><p>They were sitting around the kitchen table, Henry teaching his girls poker. His little one, Janey was sitting so close to Phryne that their arms were touching. Their house was tiny, and with only two bedrooms it meant that the girls had shared one bed since Janey was about three and they were joined at the hip as a result. Janey rarely did anything without Phryne which both amused and scared him. He could see Janey was somewhat reliant on her older sister and he didn't want her to be too dependent. The world was a harsh place, much worse for a woman and he wanted both of his girls to be strong,

even though his actions perhaps suggested he didn't care. They were all that mattered, and along with his wife he didn't care about anything else. He knew his drinking and gambling suggested otherwise but they were just habits. He could give them up anytime, or so he told himself every time he stared at the bottom of an empty glass.<p>

"What do you think my girl?"

Phryne eyed him in cheekiness, those blue eyes of hers glittering in the dull light. She took after Margaret most in looks, although those blue eyes were all his. She pointed to the six of clubs.

"That one."

He kissed her on the cheek and winked at her. "And Janey?"

Janey, who relied on Phryne for everything leaned into her sister, resting her head on her arm. "Six of clubs."

Henry reached over and cupped her cheek. "I've taught my girls well."

"Dinner!"

Janey sat up straighter in her chair, licking her lips as three plates with potatoes and some small pieces of steak were placed in front of them.

"And, two glass of milk."

Margaret bent over her girls and kissed each of them on their heads, placing the milk on the table.

Janey picked up her glass and bringing it to her lips, took one, careful sip. She closed her eyes as the soft, thick, velvety liquid hit her tastebuds, descending down her throat. She felt it hit her stomach and already make her feel less empty.

"Beautiful."

Phryne locked eyes with her mother and both of them broke into laughter. She leaned into Janey and kissed her on the cheek.

"You can thank your father for this feast tonight."

Phryne sat up straighter in her chair and looked at her mother in surprise before seeing her father grimace in an attempt to get her to not say anything. She breathed out sharply and sunk further back into her chair.

These were the moments. The moments she realised her father was not how he should be. She wasn't sure what it all meant but it made her feel sick in the stomach. She had picked that lock, walked through that house and asked that man for this food, not him. He had asked her to do it and she had done it, because he was her father and she trusted him, yet she was continually being shown that her trust in him was a waste of her time.

She reached into her dress pocket and let her fingers brush over the

lipstick that she had hid from him. She knew he would be annoyed at her for taking it but it was hers. And she was keeping it.

* * *

><p>She leaned against the window, tracing the falling rain with her fingertips. She focused on the patterns they made, twirling and spinning, dipping and falling. It was all so unpredictable. Just like him.<p>

She turned away from the window and stared back at the couch. It was the one piece of furniture in this room and it was so old that part of the cushion was worn away. Her father was passed out after he had disappeared after dinner and stumbled back in the house, waking her up. She had carefully got out of bed, doing her best not to wake Janey and had tip toed down their hallway, the cold night air biting at her skin. She had found him here. Asleep. Stinking of beer and cigarettes. She had noticed the star brooch was gone and she knew he had taken it, pawned it already and used the money on alcohol.

She watched his chest rise and fall with breath. She loved him so much but he kept making her feel this way. Sick, sad, lonely.

She decided to leave him there, knowing that if she woke him up he would be really, really angry.

She walked back down the hallway and turned into her bedroom. She crouched down on the floor and crawling under the bed, reached into the back corner and there, resting against the wall was the red lipstick. She grabbed it, and crawling out backwards stood up, holding the gold cylinder up to the light.

She pulled off the cap and slowly wound the lipstick up to the top. She stared at it for a moment and bringing it up to her lips, carefully outlined where she thought her lips were in the darkness, that creamy, waxy smell permeating the air around her.

She climbed back into bed and reaching for Janey, pulled her into her body, hugging her tightly. She placed a kiss on her forehead and as the moonlight streamed in from the window above their bed, she could see that red lip print on Janey's forehead in the pitch, black darkness. She closed her eyes, hoping that kiss would always keep them safe.

End
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